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News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, March 19, 2010
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3 California men indicted for conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine in Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS – B. Todd Jones, United States Attorney for the District of Minnesota, announced that a federal grand jury returned an indictment against three California men for allegedly conspiring to distribute five pounds of methamphetamine in the Twin Cities last month. In the indictment, which was filed with the U.S. District Court earlier today, Cesar Ernesto Rivas, age 40, and Phonesy Sydathong, age 41, both of Sacramento, California, and Brandon Sanchez Gonzalez, age 19, of San Diego, California, were charged with one count of conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

The indictment alleges that from January 1 through February 27, 2010, the defendants conspired to distribute 500 or more grams of methamphetamine. According to an affidavit filed in the case, authorities arranged a controlled purchase of methamphetamine from Sydathong at a restaurant in Bloomington on February 26, 2010. At the restaurant, police learned that Rivas was the source of the methamphetamine and later observed Rivas and Sydathong leaving the restaurant and getting into a vehicle, where they allegedly were shown a large sum of money. Delivery of the drugs was scheduled to occur the next day in the parking lot of a Wendy's restaurant in St. Paul. At the arranged time, officers purportedly observed Gonzalez drive into the lot to meet Rivas and Sydathong. They then followed the defendants to a St. Paul apartment, where the transaction allegedly occurred. Once the methamphetamine had been handed over, the three men were arrested.

If convicted, the defendants face a potential maximum penalty of life in prison. All sentences will be determined by a federal district court judge.

This case is the result of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the St. Paul Police Department. It is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Christian S. Wilton.

An indictment is a determination by a grand jury that there is probable cause to believe that offenses have been committed by a defendant. A defendant, of course, is presumed innocent until he or she pleads guilty or is proven guilty at trial.